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Fifth session
8-25 April 1997
Agenda item 4

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

DIALOGUE SESSIONS WITH MAJOR GROUPS

Summary report of the synthesis session (18 April 1997)

Chairman: Ambassador Bagher Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, Commission on Sustainable Development

During the final dialogue session, representatives of the following organizations provided a brief recap of the views expressed during their dialogue session and made recommendations for future dialogue sessions:

International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) (for scientific and technological communities)

Youth Caucus (for children and youth)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) (for women)

Maori Congress (for indigenous people)

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) (for workers and trade unions)

Instituo del Tercer Mundo (for non-governmental organizations)

International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) (for local authorities)

International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) (for farmers)

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (for business and industry)

All presenters felt that the dialogue sessions were useful as a first step towards further sharing of views on problems and solutions as well as building of greater consensus around Agenda 21 objectives. Several presenters expressed disappointment with the low attendance of Governments in the dialogue sessions.

A performance by the New York City Labor Choir preceded the question/dialogue segment of the programme.

DIALOGUE

Representatives of the following Governments made statements: Canada, Finland, France, Peru, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America. Statements were also made by representatives of the following bodies: South Pacific Forum Secretariat, United Nations Association-United States of America (UNA-USA), International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), ICFTU, NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development and Human Rights and Peace Caucus.

The statements expressed appreciation for the dialogue sessions, particularly in terms of showing the progress made through major groups' activities during the first five years of Agenda 21 implementation. Low attendance was attributed to the numerous meetings and events rather than to lack of interest in sharing views with major groups (Sweden). Major group panellists were asked about the extent to which they engaged in dialogue with each other (Finland) and about which methods they utilized to mobilize their constituencies to act upon Agenda 21 objectives (France). It was suggested that universities should be more involved in exchanging information (Peru). The South Pacific Forum announced that it would distribute the dialogue session summaries among its member States.

The crucial role of young people in furthering the goals of Agenda 21 was emphasized (UNA-USA). Local Agenda 21 initiatives were pointed to as a vehicle for mobilizing local Governments and communities at the local level (ICLEI). It was pointed out that the Commission on Sustainable Development was a perfect global forum in which to explore solutions as the next phase moved increasingly towards more action and implementation (WBCSD). The fact was also highlighted that achieving sustainable development was a slow process in which continued dialogue with major groups was crucial (NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development). It was suggested that in future the Commission on Sustainable Development reporting process should involve major groups to a greater extent, as well as focus on the human rights and military aspects of sustainable development (Human Rights and Peace Caucus). The trade union representative called attention to the ongoing silence about workplace issues in Agenda 21 follow-up (ICFTU).

Suggestions and proposals for future dialogue sessions

All participants made suggestions for future dialogue sessions or similar vehicles with respect to exchange of views between Governments and major groups. The following proposals were put forth:

- Focus dialogue sessions on specific thematic issues (Canada, Sweden, United Kingdom, ICSU, Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Maori Congress). Possible themes mentioned parallelled the key issues singled out in the high-level segment of the current session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

- Encourage a more interactive format (Canada).

- Schedule dialogue sessions outside the negotiating hours (Sweden) or when more delegations are available to attend them (United States).

- Involve other sectors of society such as those comprising artists, writers, religious communities (Sweden).

- Continue hearing the views of all major groups (United States).

- Ensure more participation from the South (Sweden).

- Enable dialogue between the major groups in a systematic way for the purpose of finding balanced approaches to the costs, benefits and risks involved in sustainable development (WBCSD).

- Establish dialogue sessions as a tradition of the Commission on Sustainable Development and encourage use of this mechanism by other bodies of the United Nations system (NGO Steering Committee of the Commission on Sustainable Development).

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PROPOSED DRAFT POLITICAL STATEMENT

Note by the Secretariat

1. Upon request of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, the Secretariat is circulating a text entitled "Proposed draft political statement", which was presented by the Chairman of the Commission, Dr. Mostafa Tolba (Egypt), and the Vice-Chairperson, Ms. Monica Linn Locher (Switzerland).

2. The Commission agreed that the text of this document would be subject to further consultations and negotiations in the context of the preparations for and during the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly (New York, 23-27 June 1997). Furthermore, it was agreed that comments on this text should be sent by 30 May 1997 to the Chairman of the Commission through the Secretariat. Accordingly, delegations are invited to submit their comments to the following address - United Nations Secretariat, Division for Sustainable Development/DPCSD, Room DC2-2220, Two United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017; fax: (212) 963-4260.

PROPOSED DRAFT POLITICAL STATEMENT

1. At the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, held from 23 to 27 June 1997, we, Heads of State and Government* and other Heads of Delegation, have gathered here to review progress in the implementation of Agenda 21,[1] which addresses the pressing problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century.

2. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992, was a landmark event. At our Summit Meeting at that Conference we launched a new global partnership for sustainable development - a partnership which respects the interests of all, and protects the integrity of our global environment. It reflects a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level for cooperation on development and environment.

3. We acknowledge that a number of positive results have been achieved in several social, economic and environmental components of sustainable development since Rio. However, we are deeply concerned that the overall outlook for sustainable development is not much better today than what it was in 1992 in many parts of the world, especially in the least developed countries.

4. In this context, we emphasize that, given the accelerating pace of the globalization process, the persistence of poverty and the growing gap between developed and developing countries, the comprehensive implementation of Agenda 21 remains vitally important and is even more urgent now than ever. We reaffirm that all the principles contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development[2] shall continue to guide us in this comprehensive implementation. We also reaffirm the commitments we pledged at Rio; we consider them all as the foundation and long-term framework for sustainable development. We pledge to work together in good faith and in the spirit of partnership to achieve our commitments. We decide to move now from words to deeds.

5. We must reverse the trend of deterioration of the environment and natural resource depletion everywhere. We shall work together to improve the current terms of international cooperation. We will all work, at the national level, to ensure good governance and full respect of human rights.

6. We shall ensure that globalization trends have a positive impact on sustainable development. To this end we shall develop, strengthen and implement national and international environmental and social policies and integrate them fully with all economic policies. We reaffirm our commitment to the empowerment and full participation of major groups of society and we underline, in particular, the critical role of women in the achievement of sustainable development.

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* When the term "Government" is used, it will be deemed to include the European Community within its area of competence.

7. We acknowledge that unsustainable and wasteful patterns of consumption and production negatively affect the quality of life and well-being and inhibit economic and social development. We commit ourselves to accelerate moves to change such patterns. We further acknowledge that achieving this requires changes in human behaviour based on the best cultural, moral and environmental ethics.

8. We shall formulate or strengthen national policies and strategies geared to substantially reducing overall poverty in the shortest possible time, reducing inequalities and eradicating absolute poverty by a target date to be specified by each country in its national context. As a step in this direction, we intend, through effective national policies and adequate international assistance, including transfer of financial resources and of environmentally sound technologies, to reduce by half, by the year 2015, the proportion of people living today in absolute poverty.

9. We also fully support the establishment of other achievable timebound goals and targets within the next five and ten years as well as longer-term targets for moving towards sustainable development. Certain goals and targets should be differentiated according to levels of progress in different regions and of nations within regions; they should be equitable and should be measurable through agreed measurement tools.

10. We commit ourselves to the expeditious conclusion of ongoing negotiations related to sustainable development (climate change, biodiversity, ozone depletion, desertification, and prior informed consent relating to trade in chemicals) and to ensuring the participation of all States in relevant existing conventions, in their full implementation and in the compliance with their provisions.

11. We reaffirm our commitment to continue to press ahead with the implementation of the whole of Agenda 21 but we wish to bring particular focus in the discussions within the Commission on Sustainable Development in the next five years on ... [to be completed in the light of the outcome of the negotiations on the programme of work].

12. To deal with the major problems facing the world in a concerted global effort it is vital that more resources are devoted to sustainable development. We commit ourselves to mobilize domestic resources for that purpose. Developed countries commit themselves to support developing countries and countries with economies in transition with adequate financial resources from all sources. They reaffirm their commitment to the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance for developing countries. We stress that we will work to ensure that investment, including domestic and foreign direct investments, contribute to sustainable development. Developed countries also confirm their intention effectively to assist in and facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. The overall goal is to ensure that developing countries become full partners in the struggle against unsustainable development and the destruction of natural resources.

13. Within the framework of the World Trade Organization we shall promote the integration of sustainable development within the multilateral trading systems

and ensure that trade rules are compatible with strong and effective environmental policies. We shall ensure that the international economic climate is conducive to helping developing countries and countries with economies in transition to produce goods and services and to have access to markets. We shall support all efforts to ensure that goods and services produced by all countries are environmentally friendly.

14. We confirm the Commission on Sustainable Development as a main forum within the United Nations system for ensuring the full integration of economic and social development considerations with those of environmental protection. We reaffirm that the United Nations Environment Programme has been and shall continue to be the principle United Nations body in the field of environment and that we shall strengthen its standing and reform it to become the leading authority in that field.

15. Time is of the essence. We need every hand to reverse the deterioration trend. The attached programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21 is our vehicle to achieve that. We shall do all we can to ensure that the public at large feel ownership of this programme. Only then can the programme be fully implemented.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] Ibid., annex I.